

SOFTWARE

FAQ

Q How do I qualify to buy the upgrade version of Windows Vista?

A The upgrade version requires you to have a previous version of either Windows XP or Windows 2000. Owners of Windows 98 and earlier versions have to buy a full version of the software.

There are two ways to upgrade: an in-place installation and a clean install. A clean install is the best way to do it and installs a fresh copy of Vista on your PC.

An in-place installation lets you upgrade your existing Windows installation, keeping your files, settings and applications. We don't recommend it, though, as not all of your applications will work and you'll carry over any problems you had in your old installation. An in-place installation also depends on your current operating system. Microsoft has full details of the upgrade options on its website (<http://tinyurl.com/hfecb>).

David Ludlow
Deputy Editor



david@computershopper.co.uk

MICROSOFT Microsoft Office 2007 Basic Edition

★★★★

£119 inc VAT

Along with Windows Vista (reviewed on page 46), Microsoft has also launched the latest version of its office suite, Office 2007. As with previous versions, there is a range of suites (see <http://tinyurl.com/y4xltv> for more details), including the new lower-cost Basic Edition, which we review here. Containing just Word, Excel and Outlook, it has pretty much everything most people use. The next version up, Standard (around £330), also includes PowerPoint.

This release is the first major Office overhaul in years. Excel and Word now have a brand new interface called the Ribbon. Instead of menus and toolbars, tabs run along the top of the screen like the tabs in an internet browser. When you click on a tab, a toolbar appears below with all the commands and controls previously found in the menus. The Ribbon displays only those commands and options found on the tab you have selected. The new look and feel makes it much easier to find the right command and to discover new features. It takes some getting used to, though, and some – such as the Developer tab, which displays macro commands – have to be turned on. This caused some confusion when we were using Excel.

The new versions of Word and Excel place a far greater emphasis on design. Both provide drop-down lists of styles and themes you can apply to your documents. Each style is represented by a thumbnail image that shows fonts, colours and other attributes. As you scroll over a thumbnail your document changes to provide a live preview of how it would look if formatted to that scheme. This approach to formatting saves time and makes it easier to design a good-looking document.

Word has received the biggest shake-up. Charts are now done entirely in Excel. Almost all the formatting options are easier to use, and we like the new word count that sits at the bottom of the screen; it updates to show the word count of a selected paragraph, too, which is useful when you're writing to length.

SUMMARY

- ✓ Well-planned, useful new interface
- ✓ Excellent design tools
- ✗ XPS format slow to open

OFFICE SUITE Requires Windows XP SP2, 500MHz processor, 256MB RAM, 1.5GB disk space
PART CODE S55-01347
SUPPLIER www.lambdatek.com
DETAILS <http://office.microsoft.com>



▲ Word's new styles and themes provide a live preview of what your document will look like

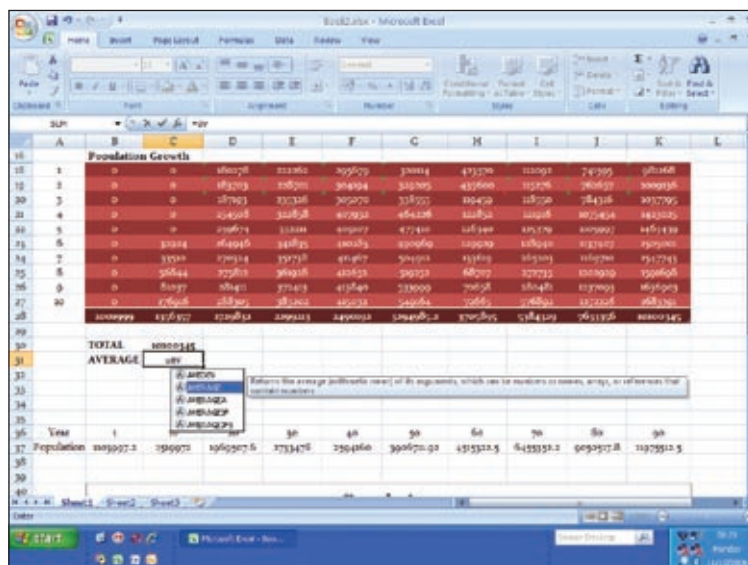
Excel has a useful new predictive function that helps you complete formulae properly. It has new templates for tables and charts, new conditional formatting features and enhanced sorting and filtering.

Outlook hasn't got a new interface, but it does have some useful new features. It can finally read RSS feeds, something the free Thunderbird email client has been able to do for a long time. The new To-Do bar allows you to see and update appointments and tasks no matter which screen you're in, and the coloured categories make organising your mail quick and easy.

Word and Excel can now save to PDF, which is great, but other office suites have been able to do this for ages. However, you still have to download and install a Microsoft PDF plug-in to make this work. The new XPS format, Microsoft's alternative to PDF, is slow to open and crashed our browser more than once. Most infuriatingly of all, both Word and Excel now have new default file formats that older versions of the two programs can't read. You have to make a conscious decision to save to the older .doc and .xls formats if you want to share documents with users of other office suites, which is a needless complication.

Annoyances with file formats aside, this is an excellent office suite and, in terms of features and ease of use, it's also the best. The Basic Edition makes Office affordable to home users for the first time. If you do a lot of word processing and spreadsheet work, then it's well worth the money. But for occasional users, either Ability Office or OpenOffice with the Thunderbird email client is a better choice.

Peter Wood



◀ Excel's new features include formatting options for tables and graphs as well as a new SmartArt feature. Most useful is the predictive function, which helps you write formulae correctly

MICROSOFT Windows Vista Home Premium

★★★★★

£191 inc VAT; £130 inc VAT upgrade

It's been delayed, rewritten and had features put in and taken out of it, but finally Microsoft's Windows Vista operating system is here. While previous versions of Windows have kept it simple with just two versions, Vista has four. Vista Business and Vista Ultimate are designed for business use, leaving Home Basic and Home Premium for regular users.

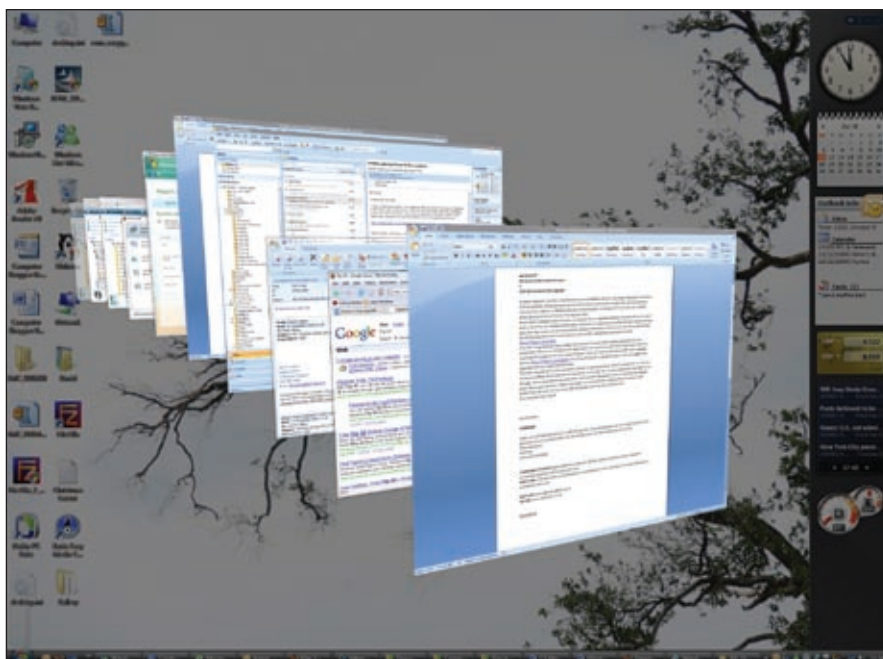
Home Basic is cheaper than Home Premium, costing £82 for an upgrade and £162 for the full version, but it lacks many of the new features that make Vista so appealing, including the new Aero interface. For that reason we've focused our review on the Home Premium version, which also includes Media Center, giving you a simple way to organise your videos and photos and a free EPG for recording TV. If you want to see the differences between the editions, see the table on Microsoft's website (<http://tinyurl.com/nultf>).

One thing you've probably heard about Vista is that it needs a significantly more powerful PC to run than Windows XP. That's not exactly true, and Vista should run on pretty much any PC bought in the past couple of years. If you're in any doubt, Microsoft's Vista Upgrade Advisor (<http://tinyurl.com/o5bq4>) will tell you if your PC is good enough and suggest any upgrades you might need to make.

Once you've installed Vista the Windows Experience Index score tells you how fast your PC is. This tests your processor, memory, graphics and hard disk, so you can see which component is holding your PC back. Instead of listing an application's requirements, manufacturers will be able to list just the required Experience Index score, which should make buying software much easier.

EASY 3D

To run the 3D Aero interface you'll need a DirectX 9-capable graphics card. The interface uses transparency, so applications' title bars are see-through. Some applications can even set the level of transparency, so they can appear



▲ Flip 3D lets you scroll through your open applications to find the one you're after

ghost-like on your desktop. It looks nice, and Aero's soft lines give Vista a Mac OS X feel.

Aero also gives you Flip 3D, which is the new way of switching between tasks. Instead of pressing Alt-Tab, Windows-Tab cycles through your applications in 3D. We were impressed to discover that if you do this while playing a video, it continues to play. It's good to see that the desktop is now its own object, so you can quickly get back to it without having to minimise all your open applications. However, we'd have liked to have seen a copy of Mac OS X's task-switching feature, which tiles all the open applications on the desktop so that you can select one with a single mouse click.

GADGETS

Vista sees the introduction of the Sidebar, which is pretty much a rip-off of Google's Desktop Search sidebar. As with Google's version, the Sidebar can display Gadgets, such as a clock, calendar and RSS feeds, and you can download new ones, such as the Outlook Info Gadget that we've been using to display our Inbox, Appointments and Tasks. Gadgets aren't locked to the Sidebar, and you can drag and drop them anywhere on your desktop.

Microsoft has also integrated its desktop search into Vista. Unlike Google's Desktop Search, Vista doesn't index your entire computer; it indexes only key folders, including My Documents. This makes sense if you think about it, as this is where you'll keep most of your files. You can add other locations to the index if you like, which is handy if you keep files elsewhere.

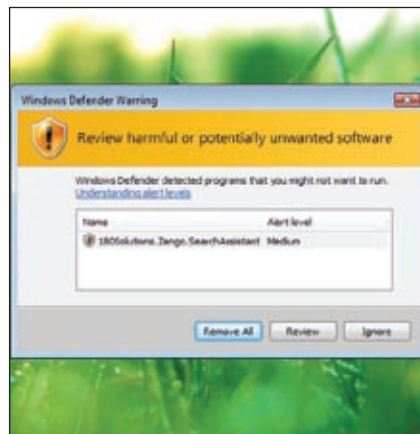
The new email client, Windows Mail, which looks and acts like Outlook Express, integrates with the index, so searching through your email is really quick. As with Google's Desktop, you can extend the index to other applications and file-types by downloading iFilters. Many of these are free, but you have to pay for others.

The best thing about the new search engine is that it is integrated into the Start menu and every Explorer window. The Start menu integration is brilliant. Just click the button, start typing and a filtered list appears, divided into web, email, documents and applications to help you find what you're after quickly.

For digital photographers there's the Windows Photo Gallery. It's very similar to Google's Picasa photo editing tool, and lets you organise and categorise your photos and videos into groups so they're easier to browse.



◀ Download Gadgets and add them to the sidebar to get access to common features and functions



▲ Windows Defender detected spyware, but it wasn't very good at removing it

SECURITY, SECURITY, SECURITY

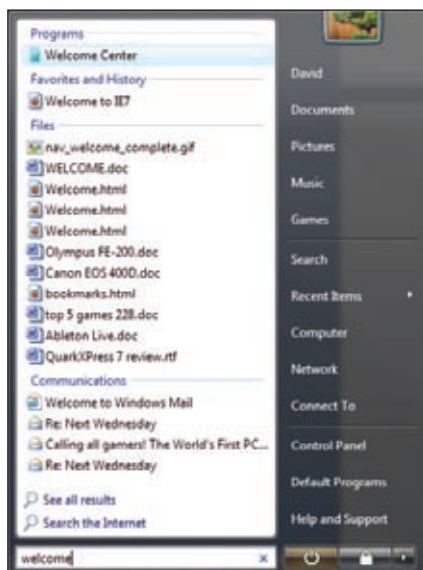
Microsoft has made many improvements under the bonnet, too. Windows XP's security, or lack of it, has been a major cause for concern over the years. Microsoft has made some significant improvements in Windows Vista, but there's still no built-in anti-virus protection.

The most obvious addition is the built-in anti-spyware software called Windows Defender. This utility lets you scan the system for bad software and provides real-time protection in an effort to stop spyware installing itself or making changes to Windows. However, our initial tests indicate that you'll still need a third-party anti-spyware program to keep you safe from Trojans, adware and other privacy-invading programs. For example, we installed some popular adware and found that, even though Defender detected it and sent it to the Quarantine area, Internet Explorer opened with a warning message. The only way to use the browser would have been to let the 'quarantined' spyware install itself.

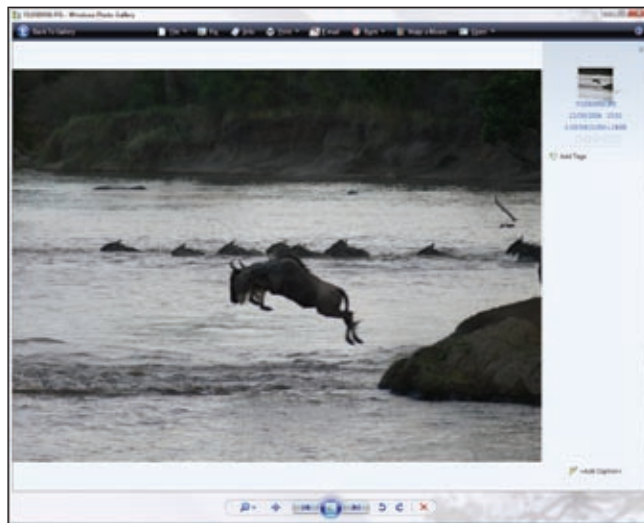
At first glance the Windows Firewall in Vista looks remarkably similar to the one in Windows XP. However, it has some very advanced new features. Many of these are going to excite only managers of large networks, but for the first time you can opt to prevent outgoing traffic as well as incoming. This means that you can explicitly block certain programs and networking ports in both directions.

Don't get too excited about this new outbound filtering feature, though: it's not the same thing as the easy-to-use application control systems we usually see on third-party firewalls. By default Windows Firewall allows all outbound connections from any application, which is not ideal and is precisely the main limitation of the Windows XP firewall.

You can choose to block all outbound connections and then manually set up a rule to allow all your favourite programs access to the internet, but this is a tedious and error-prone process. This and other powerful features lie hidden in a special administration area that you access from the Control Panel. Despite the flexibility it provides, it's not a friendly interface. It looks as if third-party security vendors will remain in business for some time to come.



▲ The search facility is built into the Start menu, so it's really quick to find an application or file



◀ The Windows Photo Gallery lets you organise and categorise your photos and videos into groups

Windows Updates has been given a facelift, too. As with the Windows XP version, it can run automatically or notify you of updates without downloading them. If Microsoft continues to issue frequent security updates, Windows Vista should be no less secure than XP.

In fact, a brand new feature promises to make Vista much more secure. It may annoy you at first, but as long as you don't give in to temptation and disable it, User Access Control should stop subversive software taking control of your PC. This feature alerts you every time the computer is instructed to run powerful programs that can make changes to the system.

For example, even if you are logged in as Administrator, you'll need to click a confirmation button to change firewall, user account or other potentially critical settings. If this confirmation window pops up when you weren't expecting it, because you weren't trying to change a setting, you simply click the Cancel button to stop bad software hacking your system.

Internet Explorer 7, which is included with Windows Vista, not only lacks some of the security problems in the previous version but also includes an indicator that warns you if the site you are visiting is trying to steal your personal information.

Worried parents will welcome the parental controls, which prevent nominated users of the system accessing certain types of sites, using certain types of applications such as internet messaging programs and can even limit computer use to certain times.

OLD APPLICATIONS, NEW FEATURES

Work has gone into other, less well-known parts of Windows. For example, the disk defragmenter is now turned on and scheduled by default, which should keep your PC running more smoothly. When you plug in an external drive you no longer have to wait for ages while Windows searches the disk for content before suggesting the 'best' action to take. Instead, the actions dialog box appears straight away while Windows is searching your disk. It's only a small thing, but it's much less frustrating.

ReadyBoost lets you increase your PC's performance by using a USB thumb drive as virtual memory. When you connect a drive you get the option to use this feature, but it works only with drives that have fast enough transfer rates, and you'll only know this by trying a drive.

WILL IT WORK WITH VISTA?

There's one problem that is impossible to get around, and that's support. At the time of writing we ran into lots of software and hardware that wouldn't work. Our benchmarks wouldn't run, and although we managed to get our video-encoding test to work, the score of 259 using an Intel Core 2 Extreme X6800 was 40 points lower than we'd expect. Call of Duty 2 ran about as quickly as it does under XP, but Doom 3 wouldn't work with ATI's beta graphics drivers.

If you're looking to upgrade an old PC, these compatibility issues could be a headache. Before you buy, check that your hardware and software are supported, and consider upgrading hardware and software if you're set on using Vista.

Windows Vista is very tricky to rate, as you'll be forced to use it next time you buy a new PC anyway. With so much incompatible hardware and software around, it's impossible for us to recommend upgrading to Vista to everyone. In fact, if you've got a perfectly good working copy of Windows XP, you can get free software and tools (Picassa and Google Desktop to name but two) that will give you Windows Vista's main functions, so there's little reason to upgrade now.

That said, if you're looking to build a new PC or have a free upgrade voucher, Vista is excellent, but check that your hardware and software is compatible first. Support from software and hardware manufacturers will improve over the next few months, so it's probably worth waiting for a while anyway.

That said, Vista is far easier to use than Windows XP, it's more secure, looks neater and is pretty much everything we'd hoped for in the next version of Windows. Just make sure you get the Home Premium Version rather than the horribly cut-down Home Basic.

Simon Edwards and David Ludlow

SUMMARY

- ✓ More secure, stable and easier to use
- ✓ Index makes finding files easy
- ✗ Incompatibility issues

OPERATING SYSTEM Requires 800MHz processor, 512MB memory, 40GB hard disk, DirectX 9-compatible graphics card for Aero interface
PART CODE 661-00017
SUPPLIER www.digitalkingdom.co.uk
DETAILS www.microsoft.co.uk

CAKEWALK Sonar 6 Producer Edition

★★★★★

£329 inc VAT



Sonar 5 was our favourite music-production software, not so much because it excelled in any particular area, but because it performed well in every area. Its core timeline and MIDI editing tools are among the best available. It includes powerful loop-manipulation functions in the style of Sony Acid and a highly flexible mix architecture. Video and surround-sound support are comprehensive, and its scoring facilities are up to scratch. However, if there's one real highlight it's the bundle of extras in the Producer Edition, with professional-quality effects and instruments that go way beyond those of the competition.

Sonar 6 takes the plug-in bundle to new heights. The VC-64 Vintage Channel is a combined noise gate, de-esser, compressor and parametric EQ with a retro-styled interface and audio characteristics to match. Digital effects are often accused of sounding clinical and lifeless, but this one successfully emulates the warmth and vitality of analogue processors. Its range of options can make it intimidating for new users, especially as it's omitted from the manuals, and we would

have liked some kind of valve distortion simulation built in. Still, the compressor in particular is the best we've heard of any plug-in bundled with music-production software.

The new addition to the instrument bundle is Session Drummer 2, a drum machine that uses acoustic drum samples and comes with a selection of MIDI patterns for you to drop into your compositions. Although there isn't much scope to edit sounds beyond pitching them up and down, each drum has been sampled at different volumes to capture the nuances of a live performance. The results are easily good enough to use in commercial recordings.

The new feature we're most excited about is AudioSnap. This identifies transients (percussive hits) in audio recordings for a variety of objectives: locking the master tempo to a recording, quantising the timing to a strict tempo or even applying the timing of an audio clip to other audio and MIDI recordings. It isn't the easiest feature to get to grips with, but with a bit of practice it's possible to lock samples into a really tight groove and even move individual hits around manually without resorting to complex edits with the scissors tool.

SUMMARY

- ✓ Extremely comprehensive audio suite
- ✓ Unsurpassed plug-in bundle
- ✗ AudioSnap doesn't live up to expectations

MUSIC-PRODUCTION SOFTWARE Requires Windows XP/x64, Pentium 1.3GHz, 256MB RAM (P4 2.8GHz, 1GB recommended), 1.5GB disk space
SUPPLIER www.dolphinmusic.co.uk
DETAILS www.cakewalk.com



▲ Add some valve warmth to your recordings with Sonar's new Vintage Channel plug-in

However, AudioSnap doesn't deliver as much as we'd hoped. Most disappointing was the fact that although it can work with multi-track recordings, it doesn't process them with phase accuracy, so manipulating multiple-microphone drum recordings caused them to drift a few milliseconds out of time with each other. The result was a tighter-sounding performance, but with the sound of someone eating a packet of crisps in the background.

Other new features include improved mapping for hardware MIDI controllers, quicker zooming of the timeline and a host of other workflow improvements. Sonar still isn't the prettiest-looking music software and its busy controls can instil fear into new users, but packing so much information onscreen makes it quick to use once you know your way around.

Other packages will appeal to certain niche groups, but for the best – or close to the best – of everything, Sonar still rules the roost.

Ben Pitt

Also consider...

SYMANTEC Norton Ghost 10

★★★★★

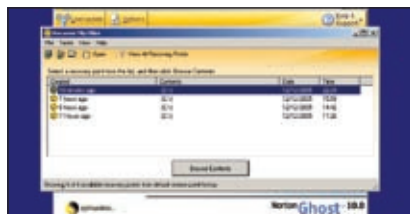
£35 inc VAT



It stands to reason that, at some point, your PC will go wrong and you'll need to turn to backups to get it working again. Symantec's Norton Ghost 10 aims to make this task as easy as possible.

It automatically makes a complete image of your PC, operating system and all. When you restore an image, you will get all your data and all your settings back the way you want them. This is an essential program for PC owners.

DISK-IMAGING SOFTWARE Requires Windows 2000/XP, 300MHz processor, 256MB RAM, 160MB disk space
PRODUCT CODE 10439689-IN **SUPPLIER** www.gameseek.com **DETAILS** www.symantec.co.uk
 ✓ Powerful and easy to use ✗ Restore CD changed our system clock **FULL REVIEW** Apr 2006



AVANQUEST RadioTracker 2

★★★★★

£20 inc VAT



RadioTracker 2 makes finding new music easy by downloading tracks automatically from internet radio stations. Simply select the genre of music that you like and the software does the rest. A new feature enables you to pick specific tracks you want – the simple way to find a rarely heard classic.

MP3 DOWNLOAD SOFTWARE Requires Windows 2000/XP, 128MB RAM, 500MHz processor, 100MB disk space
SUPPLIER <http://shop.avanquest.com> **DETAILS** www.avanquest.com ✓ Downloads the music you want ✗ Can't delete unwanted tracks easily **FULL REVIEW** Feb 2007



MOZILLA Firefox 2.0

★★★★★

Free



The best browser on the market has just got even better with Firefox 2.0. New features include short cuts to search popular websites and a phishing filter. Tabs are easier to manage, and if your browser crashes, it reloads them all the next time you start the application.

Firefox is fast and easy to use, and remains our favourite browser.

WEB BROWSER Requires Windows 98 or later, 233MHz processor, 64MB RAM, 50MB disk space **DETAILS** www.mozilla.com ✓ Reloads tabs after a crash ✗ Fast Find doesn't have a next button **FULL REVIEW** Feb 2007



YOSEMITE TECHNOLOGIES Backup PC Desktop 8.1

★★★★

\$139 (around £70)

Losing important files through hardware malfunction or user error can be a real headache. But while the consequences for home users are usually limited to the loss of some personal files and photos, for a small business the loss of important files can have serious consequences.

Yosemite's Backup PC Desktop 8.1 is based on the company's business backup applications, but it's designed to protect only a single PC. Its comprehensive range of features include the ability to schedule complex backup routines to safeguard against data loss and maintain a historical file archive. Yosemite uses the concept of jobs to control the backup, retrieval and verification process, and a set of wizards make job creation relatively easy. The interface is clean and reasonably easy to navigate, but unless you have prior knowledge of backup concepts and networking terminology, you'll need to spend some time consulting the well-written user guide.

Backup, Restore and Verify functions form the backbone of the Backup PC suite. You can specify which data should be saved, how often and to which storage device. You can choose to make full

backups, where all data is copied; differential backups, which copy only data that has changed since the last full backup; or incremental backups, which copy data that has changed since the last backup of any kind. There is also a full copy function, which creates a snapshot of your PC. Data verification is a breeze and can be run as an independent job or as part of a backup or restoration job.

Backup PC keeps an archive of file versions, which means you can recall an earlier version if needed. This is a useful tool and is central to advanced archiving, but for some reason it is hidden deep within a restore job's properties, rather than as an option when running a restore. As well as these core job types, there are a number of housekeeping jobs that make controlling large-scale backups easier.

The disaster recovery tool creates bootable media. These are used only in the event of a serious system failure, so you need only re-run this wizard after installing new hardware or making other significant system changes. You can create bootable CDs, DVDs and REV tape media, but



▲ Yosemite's Backup PC's interface is clean, but you'll need some knowledge of backup terminology to make the most of it

SUMMARY

- ✓ Comprehensive backup system
- ✗ Difficult to use
- ✗ Expensive

BACKUP SOFTWARE Requires Windows 2000/XP, Internet Explorer 6. 250GB backup limit with home version
SUPPLIER www.yosemitetech.com
DETAILS www.yosemitetech.com

remote disaster recovery is not possible so even if you have a network, you'll need to connect your tape drive directly to the faulty computer.

This is certainly a powerful application, but home users will find it too cumbersome and expensive compared with other applications tailored to that environment. Instead, we recommend using Norton Ghost 10 (see 'Also Consider...') to create a complete image of your PC and then use Windows Backup or a similar application to take regular backups of your important files. Alternatively, an application such as LogMeln Backup (*What's New*, September 2006) lets you back up your files over the internet. Small business users would be better off with Yosemite's Workgroup product, which can protect up to 10 PCs and be managed centrally.

David McKinnon

Also consider...

MICROSOFT Encarta Reference Library 2007

★★★★★

£40 inc VAT



Encarta is the best encyclopedia you can get for your PC. It's easy to search and illustrates a lot of its entries with multimedia items that really help kids learn. Its articles are quite short, but external links take you to more in-depth content. It provides a stunning balance of facts and fun.

ENCYCLOPEDIA Requires 600MHz processor, 256MB RAM, 850MB disk space PRODUCT CODE 83012047

SUPPLIER www.johnlewis.com DETAILS www.microsoft.com

✓ Friendly interface and excellent multimedia

✗ Lacks depth in some articles FULL REVIEW Jan 2007



ROXIO Easy Media Creator 9 Suite

★★★★★

£44 inc VAT



This suite comes with all the media-editing tools you'll ever need. Its greatest strengths are its tight integration between all the modules and its friendly, task-oriented interface. With capable editing tools, it's great value and the best media suite you can buy, although there's not enough difference to warrant upgrading from version 8.

MEDIA SUITE Requires Windows XP/Vista, 2GHz processor, 512MB RAM, 1GB disk space PRODUCT CODE 227000UK

SUPPLIER www.ebuyer.com DETAILS www.dabs.com

✓ Excellent media-editing tools ✗ Little reason to upgrade

from Creator 8 FULL REVIEW Jan 2007



KASPERSKY Anti-Virus 2006

★★★★★

£28 inc VAT



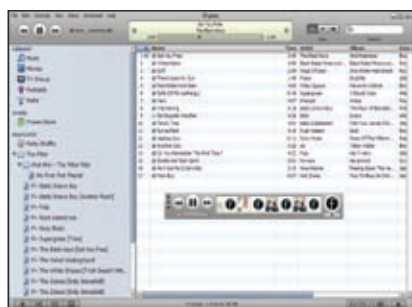
Kaspersky's Anti-Virus scans all the usual areas for threats including email and web traffic, as well as your hard disk. It performed perfectly in our tests, detecting every sample that we threw at it. If you need to clean an infected PC, the option to create a bootable scanning CD is invaluable. It's well priced, simple to use and the top-notch protection will keep your PC safe.

ANTI-VIRUS SOFTWARE Requires Windows 98 or later, 150MHz processor, 32MB RAM, 50MB disk space

SUPPLIER Kaspersky 08700 113461

DETAILS www.kaspersky.com ✓ Effective detection and handy extra features FULL REVIEW Jun 2006





▲ The Filter makes it easy to build new playlists in iTunes

EXABRE The Filter

★★★★★

Free

The Filter is an iTunes plug-in that automatically builds playlists from your music library based on the properties of one or more selected songs. Ideally this should save you the trouble of creating playlists song by song, while still giving you editorial control over the process.

Using The Filter is really easy. The interface is similar to that of iTunes when minimised, with track navigation buttons and an information display. The striking difference is the black Filter button, which you use to build a new playlist based either on the song currently playing or from a few tracks selected in your iTunes music library.

You can also create playlists based on an artist or genre, but the results are similar to those built on a song. Each playlist is saved in iTunes so you can replay it later.

Music files such as MP3s and those in Apple's ACC format contain information called ID3 tags, which hold details such as the song name, artist, album and genre. The Filter uses these tags, along with information gleaned from the internet about the listening habits of others, to find similar songs in your collection.

Skipping forward over a chosen song notifies The Filter that it doesn't suit the current playlist, and it won't appear in that context again. In this way it gradually learns about your tastes and uses this information in compiling future playlists.

While The Filter certainly takes the labour out of playlist creation and does a reasonable job of guessing what you want to listen to, don't expect it to read your mind. Creating the perfect compilation is still a manual job. However, for exploring your music collection and rediscovering old favourites, The Filter does a great job.

A promised Windows Media Player version is on its way, but for now The Filter is limited to iTunes.

David McKinnon

SUMMARY

- ✓ Simple to use
- ✓ Helps you rediscover your music collection
- ✗ Doesn't always get it right

PLAYLIST CREATION SOFTWARE Requires Windows XP, iTunes, 25MB disk space
SUPPLIER www.thefilter.com
DETAILS www.thefilter.com



▲ You can set Diskeeper to run in the background, so you won't even notice it

DISKEEPER Diskeeper 2007 Home

★★★★★

£24 inc VAT



Windows splits your hard disk into little blocks called clusters; your files are then divided and written to the disk. This makes efficient use of your hard disk's free space, but over time, individual files can get spread across the disk's entire surface, which slows down your PC. Diskeeper 2007 Home aims to reassemble your files into one piece to improve performance.

A defragmentation package will never be the most exciting bit of software you buy. Diskeeper seems to have recognised this and has added several new features that mean you never have to interact with it. The new InvisiTasking feature runs the application in the background, where it silently monitors your PC. As soon as your hard disk becomes fragmented, the software can begin to defragment it. It's intelligent, and will stop the process if you start using your PC, so you won't even notice that the software is running.

This should work for most people, but you can also tell the software when you don't want it to run – during work hours, say – so that your PC will always be free when you want to use it. If the automatic tools don't sound as if they'll suit you, there's always the option to run a job manually. If you're a notebook user you can also turn Diskeeper off when you're running on battery power to save energy.

Windows' integrated defragmentation utility lacks Diskeeper's sophistication and is hard to schedule. It also runs only within Windows, whereas you can launch Diskeeper at boot time to move files that can't be relocated safely while Windows is running.

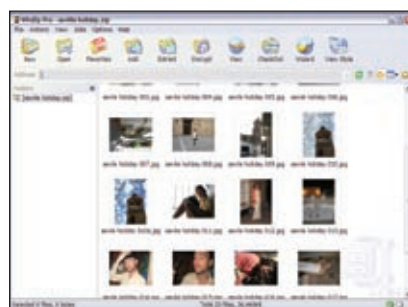
The new features aren't worth the upgrade if you've got the previous version, but if you're looking for an easy way to keep your hard disk in optimum condition, Diskeeper 2007 is the best defragmentation application you can buy and far better than the built-in Windows tool.

David McKinnon

SUMMARY

- ✓ Efficient defragmentation
- ✓ Works in the background
- ✗ Not worth upgrading from previous version

DEFRAGMENTATION SOFTWARE Requires Windows 2000/XP. Maximum drive size 768GB
SUPPLIER www.diskeeper.com
DETAILS www.diskeeper.com



▲ WinZip's thumbnail view of archived image files is a useful new feature

WINZIP WinZip Pro 11

★★★★

£30 inc VAT

WinZip is the oldest file compression tool for Windows. Using mathematical compression algorithms, WinZip can squeeze files into a single archive, so they take up less space on your PC and take less time to transfer over the internet. It's also a handy way of packaging together related files to send to someone.

The level of compression depends to a large extent on the type of file you're zipping. Many of today's common file types, such as MP3 music files and JPG image files, are already highly compressed, so WinZip, like other compression applications, achieves little overall reduction in file size. Office documents and other types of image file are more responsive, though, and can be compressed significantly.

Our tests reflected this fact, and neither WinZip or WinRAR managed to compress our photo or music folder significantly. While WinRAR achieved a slightly better compression ratio on our mixed document test, it took about four times longer to process the job.

WinZip Pro 11 has some significant new features, including pre-extraction thumbnails for images, support for RAR and BZ2 files and archive scheduling, but it's not as easy to use or as comprehensive in its file support as WinRAR.

WinZip's main competition comes from Windows, which has built-in support for creating and opening Zip archives. Windows may not be able to create password-protected or self-extracting files, but how often do you use those features? With today's large hard disks and fast internet connections, the need for dedicated compression applications such as WinZip isn't as great as it used to be.

WinZip is fast and has all the features you'll need if you do a lot of work with Zip files, but it doesn't provide enough new features to warrant an upgrade from the old version. WinRAR has wider file support for those who deal with a lot of different archives, and Windows' own Zip support is good enough for simple use.

David McKinnon

SUMMARY

- ✓ Very quick
- ✗ Little reason to upgrade from previous version
- ✗ WinRAR has wider archive support

FILE COMPRESSION SOFTWARE Requires Windows 2000/XP, 12MB disk space
SUPPLIER www.winzip.com
DETAILS www.winzip.com